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ABSTRACT

This project identified work environment factors in eight schools where a teacher preparation program placed early field experience students and where the university students reported experiencing positive field placements. The purpose was to determine the impact of certain variables on teachers' perception of the quality of their own professional life. A survey of 68 teachers addressed administration, time, students, interruptions, work environment, external support, internal support, job market, extrinsic rewards, and evaluation. Findings indicated that: (1) females were more comfortable with the job market than were males; (2) elementary teachers were more satisfied and less stressed than secondary teachers; (3) there were no differences between teachers with Bachelor's degrees and those with Master's degrees; (4) on the secondary level, older teachers were less satisfied, more stressed, and less comfortable with the quality of life than were younger teachers. The study concludes that factors accounting for a positive atmosphere for field experience students include: elementary school with older teachers, external support available in the form of student recognition which leads to student involvement, and not necessarily a faculty with advanced degrees. (JDD)

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THE HIDDEN FACTOR IN EARLY FIELD EXPERIENCE: TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF THE QUALITY OF LIFE AT WORK

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INTRODUCTION

The following scene is all too familiar to ATE members who are involved in early field placements: principal agrees to consider university field placements: principal agrees to accept university field student; nice cooperating teacher greets field student; eager student reports that classroom experience with teacher seems positive; soon, very soon, student complains that the field experience at this school is a negative placement.

Student complaints include these sample student quotations:

> "Everyone is dead. All the teachers just do the same thing everyday. All they do in the teachers' lounge is complain. They told me it was stupid for me to come to this campus seminar today."
>
> "It's weird. No one talks to anyone else. I haven't even seen the principal. Mrs. X eats lunch in her room. Every once in awhile I have a smoke with the janitor. He at least talks to me!"
>
> "It seems like they (the teachers) hate the students. And I don't think the kids like them. And the parents just don't care. I'm not going to make any dent here!"

What makes for a positive and, therefore, high quality school-wide environment for university field students? The student complaints presented in paragraph two embody several factors investigated in past research dealing with the work life of schools. Such factors include the availability of professional activities, social interaction, and appreciation by colleagues and others.

The present project is designed to identify some of the factors related to the

work place of eight schools, where one of two university teacher preparation programs recently began to place early field students and where the university students reported experiencing positive field placements.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

What factors within a work environment contribute to employee satisfaction? Herzberg in 1966 theorized that motivational factors such as recognition and involvement must be present in order for employees to feel positive and to then become productive (Frase, 1988). Other factors according to Herzberg, such as supervision, interpersonal relations, and basic working conditions, must also be positively perceived or else employees will be troubled by their absence. If troubled, employees typically are unable to respond to the positive attributes of the work place (Nussel et al., 1988). In short, some qualities of the workplace enhance, while others detract from the nature of a work environment.

More recent studies have identified specific aspects of teachers' workplace that actually enhance and contribute to the overall quality of their personal satisfaction. For example, in 1974 Spuck found that positive social interaction among staff members was characteristic of districts that experience easier recruitment of new teachers and higher levels of veteran teacher retention (Frase, 1988). Similarly, Fiestritzer in 1986 identified the opportunity to work with students and appreciation by others as two powerful motivators for teachers (Frase, 1988). Another study by

Sederberg and Clark (1940) interviewed 18 award winning teachers and found that these teachers reported a strong need to be (a) involved in professional activities and (b) recognized by peers and administrators.

Other factors seem to actually distract from and to undermine teacher motivation. Mid-career teachers are thought to be more vulnerable to job-related stress (Evans, 1989). Evans' suggested remedy to this professional malady was to add and tailor two characteristics typically missing from most work places, namely teacher recognition and faculty collegiality.

In summary, Herzberg's (1966) suggestion that (a) recognition by students, other teachers, or administrators and (b) informal or formal involvement in activities with other professionals are two important qualities of the work place seems to have strong research support. The existence or absence of these qualities in a school is sensed by both teachers who work there and university field students who visit these sites. For the students, the presence of positive qualities in the work place foster their professional enjoyment; the absence of these qualities leads to their discomfort and dissatisfaction.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the present study was to determine the impact of group characteristics (i.e., age, sex, elementary/secondary, degree and years in service) on

teachers' perception of the quality of their own professional life. One assumption of the present work was that faculty members who possess a positive attitude toward their work would provide an enriched educational environment for university field students.

METHODOLOGY

Surveys were distributed to eight schools over an eight week period during the second semester of the academic year. The total distribution was two hundred with a total usable return of sixty-eight.

Subjects:

The following is pertinent information:

1. Age ranged from 22 years of age to 60 years of age.
2. Thirty (30) Elementary and thirty-eight (38) Secondary teachers responded.
3. Sixteen (16) respondents were males and fifty-two (52) respondents were females.
4. Years in service ranged from one (1) to thirty-three (33).
5. Thirty-seven (37) respondents possessed the Bachelor's degree and thirty-one (31) possessed the Master's degree.

Instruments

The questionnaire, entitled "The Quality of Teacher Work Life Survey" by Pelsma and Harrington (1984), consists of 36 statements. Each statement was rated

on two dimensions, satisfaction (180 optimal) and stress (180 optimal), and a combined score was then computed to measure the respondents' feelings toward the overall quality of their work life (360 optimal).

The 36 statements covered 10 overlapping topics: administration, time, students, interruptions, work environment, external support, internal support, job market, extrinsic rewards, and evaluation.

Each dimension is scored on a Likert Scale of 1-5 with satisfaction ranging from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied) and with stress ranging from 1 (extreme stress) to 5 (no stress). The quality of life in the workplace was the sum of perceived stress (or lack of it), plus the perceived satisfaction (or dissatisfaction). Thus, a quality score of 10 for an individual item was the optimal quality rating; likewise, a rating of 2 equaled a minimum quality score.

FINDINGS

1. As regards gender, females reported being more comfortable with the job market than did males (see Table I).

2. As regards elementary teachers vs. secondary teachers, elementary teachers were:
    a. More satisfied, less stressed, and thus more satisfied with the overall quality of life and work;
    b. More comfortable with time, students, external support, job market, and extrinsic rewards (see Table II).

3. There was no significant difference when comparing the Bachelor's degree to the Master's degree.

4. As regards age (>20<41; >41), older individuals felt more comfortable with external support (see Table III).

5. There was no significant difference when comparing years of service in the profession.

6. As regards males and age, older males were less comfortable with time (see TABLE IV).

7. As regards females and age, older females were more satisfied with the overall quality of life at work, time, work environment, and external support (see TABLE V).

8. There was no significant difference when comparing elementary teachers with years of service in the profession.

9. As regards secondary teachers and years of service in the profession, older teachers were less satisfied, more stressed, and less comfortable with the overall quality of life (see TABLE VI).

DISCUSSION

The importance of high quality and supportive field placements for preservice university students has been known for some time. Less is known, however, regarding the factors which contribute to a satisfying work environment and which thus impact the field experience for the preservice student. The purpose of this study was to isolate certain group factors and to determine their importance relative to and impact upon one's satisfying work environment. In choosing to examine this issue, a target population of inservice teachers was examined. Among those participating in the present investigation, a relatively balanced distribution was achieved in all

pertinent categories except for gender. In that category, only sixteen males responded while fifty-two females replied.

In interpreting the findings of the study, three distinct groupings of demographic factors are significant. They are: gender, elementary/ secondary, and degree. First, with regard to gender, females appear to be more comfortable than males with the quality of their work life and this comfort increases with age. However, a word of caution is warranted here. As mentioned previously, a greater number of females responded to the survey and this factor could have influenced the findings. Second, there was no significant difference in the respondents' perception of the work environment with regard to possession of the basic rather than the advanced degree. Thus, this raises significant questions regarding the reasons for pursuing an advanced degree. Although most school districts will reward the pursuit and completion of an advanced degree with an increase in pay, it is hoped that the main benefits of an advanced degree would include improved teaching and thus a more satisfying work environment. Third and finally, there is a significant finding associated with secondary teachers regardless of their gender. Namely, older secondary teachers and those with more years in service to the profession were less satisfied, more stressed and less comfortable with the overall quality of their life at work. If one is willing to accept a connection between an individual's feeling toward the work place and the quality of teaching, it would appear that secondary schools

which possess a stable faculty may be inadvertently perpetuating poor teaching.

The important aspects of the quality of life of the teachers in this study appear to be the role and impact of external support and external rewards which they receive. The former aspect appears very important to the older teachers. The importance of such working conditions as these is consistent with Herzberg's and Fiestritzer's proposal that recognition, (e.g., support, rewards, etc.) does create a positive perception of teachers' work environment.

The findings are also consistent with Herzberg's proposal that positive work perceptions will prevail only if potentially negative conditions are absent from the work setting. For example, in the present investigation we found that elementary teachers, especially the older ones, were satisfied with such basic working conditions as time, work environment, and job market. In addition, we found that older males were not as satisfied with the aspect of time as related to their work environment. This finding was especially characteristic of secondary teachers. The secondary teachers in the present study reported being less satisfied and more stressed in other ways, too. Those with more years of service were less comfortable with the overall quality of their work life. These negative feelings are in contrast to the elementary teachers, including those who were older, who were overall more satisfied and less stressed. Lastly, the present research revealed that teachers positive or negative feelings did not seem related to the highest degree they had earned (i.e., Bachelor

versus Masters).

In brief, what accounts for a school building in which early field experience students sense a positive atmosphere? It appears that it is an elementary school with older teachers but clearly not a high school with older teachers. It is a building with external support available in the form of rewards which lead to student involvement or stems from students recognition. It is not necessarily a faculty with advanced degrees.

These conclusions would seem to contradict many current university policies. Universities often seem to require or desire advanced degrees for those who act as cooperating teachers. Young teachers however are often perceived as having methods which are on the cutting edge and thus being able to be better cooperating teachers.

And where should secondary field students be placed? This is difficult in that many of the older teachers' perceptions regarding the quality of life at work appear to be negative. Such negative perceptions could impact the early field experience placement in a detrimental fashion.

Because of the above findings, several recommendations are suggested by the present research:

a. Use teachers who have schedules, work habits, or a home life that allows for time considerations in dealing with the field students. Such characteristics should be noted in the assigned teacher and other teachers (team, grade level, wing, etc.), if not in the total building.

b. Ideally, identify and confront the sources of negative perceptions. Or, a more practical recommendation may be to explain these 10 aspects and the potential negative impact to each field student in order to have the students study the impact via structured interviews and/or reflective journals.

c. Universities should provide the seemingly powerful rewards or recognition mechanisms as a part of their university-school working relationship. If no institutional reward (e.g., stipends, affiliations, certificates or appreciation, etc.) can be provided, encourage the field students to develop a sign or symbol of recognition (e.g., small gift, K-12 student-made cards, photographs, etc.)

Finally, further study with a larger sample and perhaps with selected interviews of both the preservice and inservice teacher would seem to be an appropriate next step in the investigation of the quality of teachers' work settings.

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ADDENDUM

TABLE I.

Means and standard deviation on the measure of comfortableness with the **Job Market** as a function of **gender**.

	N	MEAN	S.D.	t	p
Males	16	5.99	1.57	-2.35	.022
Females	52	6.97	1.42		

TABLE II.

Means and standard deviation on the measure of **satisfaction, stress, total quality of life at work, time , students, external support, job market** and **extrinsic rewards** as a function of **grade level**.

		N	MEAN	S.D.	t	p
Satisfaction	E	30	117.90	22.36	4.34	.0001
	S	38	95.47	20.15		
Stress	E	30	127.26	26.56	3.89	.0001
	S	38	104.76	21.39		
Total Score	E	30	246.50	46.43	4.44	.0001
	S	38	200.52	39.00		
Time	E	30	6.11	1.74	3.30	.002
	S	38	4.87	1.37		
Students	E	30	6.38	1.87	3.66	.001
	S	38	4.98	1.26		
External Support	E	30	6.85	1.68	3.92	.0001
	S	38	5.42	1.31		
Job Market	E	30	7.15	1.45	2.04	.045

	S	38	6.41	1.49		
Extrinsic	E	30	6.46	2.04	2.31	.024
Rewards	S	38	5.47	1.50		

TABLE III.

Means and standard deviation on the measure of comfortableness with **external support** as a function of **age**.

	N	MEAN	S.D.	t	p
Group 1 (>20<41)	36	5.66	1.37	-2.16	.034
Group 2 (>40)	32	6.50	1.81		

TABLE IV.

Means and standard deviation on the measure of males comfortableness with **time** as a function of **age**.

	N	MEAN	S.D.	t	p
Group 1 (>20<41)	12	6.48	1.22	3.22	.006
Group 2 (>40)	4	4.17	1.29		

TABLE V.

Means and standard deviation of the measure of female comfortableness with the overall **quality of life at work**, **time**, **work environment**, and **external support** as a function of **age**.

		N	Mean	S.D.	t	p
Total Score	Group 1 (>20<41)	24	205.66	48.68	-2.08	.043
	Group 2 (>41)	28	233.96	49.27		

Time	Group 1 (>20<41)	24	4.75	1.64	-2.15	.036
	Group 2 (>41)	28	5.71	1.58		
Work Environment	Group 1 (>20<41)	24	6.43	2.34	-2.27	.027
	Group 2 (>41)	28	7.60	1.28		
External Support	Group 1 (>20<41)	24	5.50	1.40	-2.53	.015
	Group 2 (>41)	28	6.66	1.85		

TABLE VI.

Means and standard deviation on the measure of a secondary teacher's **satisfaction, stress**, and **overall comfortableness with the quality of life at work** as a function of **years in service to the profession**.

		N	Mean	S.D.	t	p
Satisfaction	Group 1 (<16)	24	100.45	20.47	2.08	.044
	Group 2 (>15)	14	86.92	17.02		
Stress	Group 1 (<16)	24	111.29	21.89	2.66	.012
	Group 2 (>15)	14	93.57	15.55		
Total Score	Group 1 (<16)	24	212.20	39.28	2.60	.013
	Group 2 (>15)	14	180.50	30.27		